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DATE: November 2, 1962

SUBJECT: Polish Reaction, Official and Unofficial, to Cuban Situation -
October 22 to 29

REF

Introduction - Summary

The Embassy believes Polish reaction, official and unofficial, during the first week of the Cuban crisis showed a degree of restraint and a sympathy for U.S. actions and policy objectives which should not go unnoted. Although the Department is in a better position to compare attitudes and actions in Poland with those in other bloc countries, on the basis of limited information it seems that the Cuban crisis made a distinction apparent between Poland and other Soviet Bloc countries in official and popular reaction and in specific measures taken in response to the crisis. As enumerated at the end of this airmgram, due to mistake or plan, domestic or foreign considerations, the Polish regime did not mimic Moscow's reactions to the Cuban situation. This, we suggest, should not be overlooked when making future policy decisions affecting Poland.

President Kennedy's Cuban quarantine speech was heard in Warsaw at midnight October 22. It apparently took the Polish regime by surprise, although in the Western hemisphere there were indications as to the topic of the address. According to a reliable informant, an impromptu meeting of several Politburo members took place at the Polish Press Agency where the President's address and subsequent commentary was read out as it was received. Instructions were issued to have eighteen copies of a Polish translation of the President's speech immediately prepared for delivery

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to particular Politburo members, Vice Premiers, intelligence and military leaders. Reportedly at three in the morning of October 23 the Polish Army was alerted.

At five in the morning of the same day a meeting was held at PZPR headquarters where the alert of the Polish Army was confirmed and the decision to call up certain reserve military specialists was made. PZPR First Secretary Wladyslaw GOMULKA is said to have taken a calm approach toward the situation and gave instructions that the press was to play down the Cuban crisis to avoid panic and because food reserves were low and scare buying was to be discouraged. Probably at the same meeting plans were put into affect to control hoarding.

Trybuna Ludu which appeared October 23 carried the first six of the President's seven points in his Cuban quarantine speech on page two. The publication of the six points was followed by the comment: Western press agencies "drew particular attention to the moves of the U.S. Government displaying a new 'demonstration of force', if not something more. It is above all stressed that six warships have been sent to the Caribbean Sea zone where there are big maneuvers of the navy and air-forces engaging 45 units of the U.S. navy and 20,000 sailors and marines." Two Embassy informants report that Trybuna Ludu editor Leon KASMAN was reprimanded in front of members of his staff by Party Press Bureau authorities for permitting the publication of the six points.

Zycie Warszawy, October 23, in a short item noted President Kennedy's speech "in which he revealed some of the aims of secret conferences in Washington and concentration of troops in the region of the Caribbean Sea. Kennedy has announced that an embargo is to be imposed on any 'offensive military equipment' sent by sea to Cuba. He justified his decision by the absurd and provocative statement that 'a series of rocket launching pads are being constructed in Cuba'."

On October 24 it appeared that the official line with respect to the Cuban situation had been received from Moscow. The official Soviet statement was published and Polish editorial writers emphasized the illegality of the United States action. Trybuna Ludu said:

"The Government of the United States claims the right to inspect the defense forces of Cuba, to classify the nature of its arms and military installations, to decide what it considers to be defensive weapons and what are weapons 'threatening the security' of the United States. On this basis the Government of the United States claims the right to extend an absolute control over the freedom of the Seas, to inspect all ships, to turn them back, and, in the event of resistance, to shoot.

"It should therefore be said that no such moral right exists, either in theory, in international practice or in moral categories. For no right exists which would permit a state after its unilateral and arbitrary declaration that it 'considers itself endangered' to undertake a military blockade, to announce the resorting to piratical acts on the open seas and to announce, in a not even sufficiently veiled

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form, a direct aggression on a neighbor's territory.

"For years the United States has been building, through a system of military pacts, a chain of military bases in foreign territories, in the immediate neighborhood of the USSR and of the socialist countries, frequently closer to the borders than the actual distance between the United States and Cuba which, after all, at the present time, is of no decisive significance. Rocket missiles and nuclear warheads are kept on these bases.

"The Soviet Union and the socialist countries have frequently protested against the establishment of these bases, have warned against the consequences and urged the conclusion of an international understanding in the matter of their liquidation.

"The endangering of the USSR by these bases does not even need to be proven. They were built as a threat to the USSR and thus was their role publicly explained by U.S. politicians and strategists as well as their allies.

"And yet the Soviet Government and the Governments of the socialist countries have never resorted to such drastic steps and to such measures as were undertaken by the United States."

Zygie Warszawy, the same day, commented:

"After many indirect attempts to overthrow the Republic of Cuba and after the whole range of threats and blackmail towards the Cuban people had been exhausted - the U.S. Government announced through President Kennedy on Monday that it would take steps which are not only a threat to the most vital interests of the Cuban people but also a threat to world security.

"It is being asserted that the United States is threatened by Cuba. Is there any need to polemicize with this thesis? Can one imagine that seven-million strong Cuba is able to threaten the greatest power of the capitalist world, which is armed to its teeth? Does Cuba, which has been threatened so many times with aggression, not have the right, just as any other state, to defend its territory and its independence?

"The Soviet Government many times has emphasized that it is supplying Cuba with weapons for defensive purposes only. However, in the hysterical atmosphere wrought up in the United States even an ordinary gun can be considered a weapon of an 'offensive character'. And anyway President Kennedy has clearly warned that his orders may include not only weapons in the future... The threats to peace are that the moves of the American Government can turn from day to day into an open act of aggression both against Cuba and anyone who dares to carry out ordinary trade exchange with it."

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At noon on October 24 the Ambassador delivered a copy of the proclamation concerning the interdiction of the delivery of offensive weapons to Cuba to Director General Jerzy MICHALOWSKI at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Michalowski accepted the proclamation but verbally rejected the action of the United States, which he called "unjustified, illegal and endangering to peace".

The Ministry of Defense, the same day, informed the American Naval Attache that eighteen Polish naval officers, who had accepted his invitation to a dinner in Sopot on October 26, would not attend in view of "the unfavorable situation".

A Western correspondent was told by the chief of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Juliusz KATZ-SUCHY, that Poland had three or four ships en route to Cuba but that the ships were not carrying arms. Katz-Suchy offered the opinion that the Soviet Union was bound to take retaliatory measures when their ships were stopped, not necessarily in Berlin but perhaps in the Baltic or Bosphorus. He went on to suggest that inspection rights in Cuba might be traded for similar rights in Turkey or elsewhere.

In the evening of October 24 Director General Michalowski arrived at a dinner at the Embassy Residence and handed the Ambassador a Polish Government statement protesting the United States action. Of the seven points in the statement, which was published in the following morning's press, only one dealt with a specifically Polish problem, namely shipping, as follows: "The Polish Government protests the U.S. decision, which constitutes a violation of the basic principles of international law and the principle of the freedom of the seas and reserves the right to take all possible measures in the case of a violation by the United States of the rights of the Polish maritime flag."* (The Embassy was subsequently informed that the 10,000-ton Bialystok was the Polish ship nearest to Cuba and that the captain of the ship was instructed to object but submit to inspection if stopped. The Poles claim the ship had a cargo of onions.) After handing the Ambassador the Polish protest, Michalowski, Vice Minister of Foreign Trade Franciszek MODRZEWSKI, Ambassador Eugeniusz MILNIKIEL of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Central Committee member Adam SCHAFF, sat down to dinner with the Ambassador and guest, Harold VEDELER, Director of the Office of East European Affairs, Department of State. This was the first example of Polish calm cordiality which prevailed toward American visitors during this period. American writers Munro LEAF, Erskine CALDWELL and Peter VIERECK were also very hospitably received by the Polish public in Warsaw and elsewhere in Poland, although in Poznan and Szczecin there were indications October 26 and 29 that regime officials were attempting to arrange heckling or interruption of Leaf's presentations.

* The Polish phrase was "zastrzega sobie prawo wyciagniecia wszystkich konsekwencji", of which a literal translation into English ("draw consequences") would make no sense - hence the free translation "take measures". A French Embassy officer believes that the Polish phraseology was probably derived from "tirer consequences", a phrase often used in French diplomatic correspondence in expressing a sort of mild, vague, noncommittal protest. It is much weaker than "prendre mesures".

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In addition on the evening of October 24, an Embassy officer was informed by a student leader, who had participated in the Cuban demonstration in front of the Embassy in April 1961, that he had received no instructions to demonstrate. Later the same evening Stefan ARSKI, editor of Swiat and long-time communist propagandist, conceded to the same officer in a heated discussion that "the President had gained an edge over Khrushchev because of the revelation of the secret installation of rockets in Cuba". Arski implied that the PZPR leadership may have been disturbed by this aspect of the recent developments; however, he argued forcefully that the USSR had a legal right to put rockets in Cuba. (A few days later another informant, who works in the PZPR Central Committee, claimed that the leadership of the PZPR was not aware of the placing of missiles in Cuba, although the PZPR was aware of the economic and trade effort to strengthen Cuba.)

The press on October 25 moved the crisis on to the front pages, publishing in full the Polish Government statement handed to the Ambassador the previous day. Stories of organized demonstrations and protest meetings at a few large factories throughout Poland and at Warsaw Polytechnic appeared. Professor Jerzy DUKOWSKI, Rector of Warsaw Polytechnic, said at one protest meeting: "While we have complete sympathy for the American people who have produced so many great people - today we cannot refrain from condemning most severely the recent aggressive American acts, which are so exceptionally dangerous to peace" (Trybuna Ludu, October 25).

However, the press did not provide a complete picture. By October 25 public reaction had set in but much of it not regime sponsored. Warsaw appeared calm, although increased buying of staples was observed. The afternoon of the 25th the deputy foreign editor of a Warsaw daily confirmed that the press was instructed not to incite the public and said that there would be no demonstration near the American Embassy. Defensively he said, "Why should we demonstrate? We have no pride at stake! Cuba is the Russian's problem, not ours." Another Embassy contact, a student at Warsaw Polytechnic, flatly stated no students from the University would come to the Embassy to demonstrate. An employee of a Warsaw factory, who had attended a protest meeting at the factory, described worker reaction at the meeting as indifferent - "Demonstrate? What for? Do diabla z tym! (The hell with it!)" In a different manner, an old gentleman symbolically came to visit an Embassy officer and after a cordial ten minutes of conversation stoop up, shook hands and said, "I am glad I am no longer President of Polish Ocean Lines".

An Embassy officer returning from an inspection of the main railroad line west of Warsaw a few days later was flagged down by a little man driving a Moskvitch and asked "Are you the green car that the Mercedes is looking for?" (Referring to an UB surveillance team which had been dropped out of sight by the fortuitous and timely lowering of a grade-crossing barrier.) "Don't worry about them, they think you've gone to Lodz. How do I know? They stopped me and asked me if I'd seen you."

The afternoon of October 25 perhaps twenty helmeted Militia were stationed around the Embassy and have continued in reduced number to the time of this

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writing. Perhaps the comment in a letter received by the Embassy October 29 is an appropriate description: "I was in Warsaw October 27 and intended to enter the Embassy, however, I was afraid to do so because the building was picketed by Militia..."

That the Moscow propaganda line was unclear is perhaps best demonstrated by the following statement in Trybuna Ludu, October 25: "President Kennedy signed the declaration on the blockade of Cuba...when the Soviet delegation (to the United Nations) clearly denied the statement that Soviet missiles are on Cuba, emphasizing that the USSR did not deliver and is not delivering any weapons of an offensive character to Cuba and that the USSR does not need any rocket bases on Cuba".

In the following days the Poles learned, largely from Khrushchev's letters, that the claim by the United States that the rocket bases were offensive was not fabricated. As the weekend approached and over the weekend statements were made to Embassy officers such as - "Kennedy's action is the smartest U.S. foreign policy move to date." "Kennedy set Khrushchev on his heels. Now can it be exploited, or will Khrushchev turn it into his 'peace' victory?" A letter received by the Embassy suggests that during anticipated future negotiations President Kennedy also arrange for the return to Poland of Baranowicz Powiat, now in the USSR.

On October 27 at the CARE presentation ceremony in Wroclaw of a heart-lung pump, 350 persons attended including the Chairman of the Wroclaw National Council and eight army medical officers headed by a full colonel. There were speeches in support of increased U.S.-Polish medical cooperation.

Perhaps a representative statement of the current Polish regime attitude regarding the Cuban crisis appeared in Trybuna Ludu, October 29: "All humanity, including our own people, has received the news about the turn of events which occurred in the dangerous crisis caused by Washington's anti-Cuban policy with great relief. The nations of the world have welcomed the recent statements of Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy with joy because they open the road towards an understanding far greater in scope than the Caribbean region. An agreement desired by the Soviet Union, all socialist states, many scores of unaligned states, and by the widest public opinion of five continents.

"From the letters of Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy published today it is clear that the Soviet Union, acting in agreement with the government of Premier Fidel Castro, has agreed to dismantle in Cuba such weapons which the American Government regards as 'offensive'. The entire operation will be conducted under the appropriate inspection and supervision of the UN."

In summarizing the happenings in Poland in the period October 22 to 29 the following points seem noteworthy:

1. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not return the President's proclamation as was done in the Soviet Union. The contents of the proclamation

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were rejected verbally. (Although the regime later evidently found it politic to issue a press notice that the contents were rejected. See Embassy Telegram A-331, October 26.)

2. No demonstration occurred outside the Embassy in Warsaw or the Consulate in Poznan. This may be explained by the statement of one Pole - "The situation is too serious to be demonstrating".

3. The Bialystok was ordered to submit to inspection if stopped by the U.S. Navy.

4. Although secret police surveillance became massive beginning October 25, movement of Embassy officers and Military Attaches has not been restricted.

5. Six of President Kennedy's seven points made in the speech October 22 were published in Trybuna Ludu. This may have happened by mistake.

6. In general, extremely friendly public reception of Americans visiting in Poland continued through the period upon which this report is based.

7. There were only a limited number of factory or university demonstrations in support of Cuba or against the United States.

8. Western radio stations - VOA, RFE and BBC - were not jammed, although it appeared there was an increase in jamming by neighboring countries.

9. Polish military forces were alerted but there was no apparent great increase in military activity.

10. The Polish press coverage of the crisis was, of course, biased, but the fact that the USSR had put weapons, offensive to the United States, in Cuba was not concealed.

11. The Turkish National Day reception October 29 was well attended by Poles.

12. Except for the Naval Attache's dinner, mentioned above, during this period invitations from Embassy officers to both official and unofficial Poles were accepted with evident pleasure, and the atmosphere at these social functions was if anything more than usually friendly.

For the Ambassador:

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